

WASHINGTON, DC- House Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (MD) spoke on the House Floor in support of legislation that would provide funding to settle African American farmers' and Native Americans' lawsuits against the federal government. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery:

"Today, the House has an opportunity to bring an end to two historic injustices. We can do so by approving the settlements in the Pigford and Cobell class-action lawsuits, helping to make amends to African American farmers and more than 300,000 Native Americans.

"The Pigford settlement concerns a decades-old pattern of racial discrimination in Department of Agriculture loans to black farmers: for too long, farmers were denied loans because of their race. Even black farmers who received loans were paid significantly less than their white counterparts. The Cobell settlement concerns mismanagement of federal trust funds, in which billions of dollars in fees and royalties on reservation land went unaccounted for. This bill can ensure that individual account holders are properly paid, prevent similar mismanagement from recurring, and resolve other outstanding land and water-rights disputes that are deeply concerning to tribal governments.

"Above all, passing this bill means living up to our obligation to those who have deserved better from the federal government. These settlements have been reached in court, and now it is our job to ensure that the federal government lives up to its end of the bargain. I'm glad that this bill funds the Pigford and Cobell settlements without adding to the deficit; and I'm also glad that this bill can bring to a close an unfortunate chapter in our history. I urge my colleagues to join me in doing the right thing by passing this bill."